

Margaret Garcia Dugan – Tucson Magnet High School**May 12, 2006**

Good afternoon students and faculty - I would like to thank you and your administration for inviting me to come and speak. As you all know, the last time you gathered in an assembly of this kind, things were said that attracted the attention of the news media and legislators. This has been an opportunity for you to see first-hand how ideas and words have tremendous power. The person who spoke those words made a decision to do so, and that was her right. Today, I want to talk with you about the power of decisions; and your responsibility to make decisions using your own skills, power and knowledge.

I would like to share four things with you: First, I am a Latina, second, I am a Republican, third, I am not here to convert you to my way of thinking, and fourth, what I want for you, is for you to think for yourselves.

I am aware that you probably know why I was asked to speak here today. The statement you heard several weeks ago - Republicans Hate Latinos is nothing more than a political statement designed to incite an emotional response. Of course, it's not true and cannot be backed up with evidence. As I said before, I happen to be a Latina and have been welcomed into the Republican Party, along with many other Latinos.

When you hear a broad and unsupported statement like, Republicans Hate Latinos, you should check it out to see if there is any evidence backing it up before you make up your mind to believe it. Any time a person gives you a blanket statement, that stereotypes people into a category, you need to be smart enough to see through that. So when statements are made, like All Latinos are this, or all blacks are this, or all whites are this, you need to know, that these statements are just as much prejudicial and bigoted statements as when one says all Republicans (you fill in the blank). All Democrats are (you fill in the blank). See it as a red flag. Just like a stereotype is a red flag; broad, general statements should also be red flags. Be guarded of what people say or tell you. What matters about someone is what he knows, what he can do, his character, his aesthetic sense – things he has some control over. Race, gender, national origin – the things one has no control over – should play no role in how we judge

individuals. This is a very fundamental value. Think for yourselves; don't let others think for you. That's one thing people can't take from you - thinking on your own and your ability to think things through and come up with your own conclusions. Wise people do that on a regular basis and measure their thoughts against data and evidence. There was a time when people were told the world was flat - for centuries people bought it. It just took someone to say, I don't think so, and prove that statement false.

I am proud and blessed to have been born into a strong, conservative, and loving Latino family, having parents and ten brothers and sisters who have encouraged me throughout my life. My father died over 24 years ago, but his beliefs and values still live in my heart and mind today.

Growing up in Bisbee, Arizona, a small mining town afforded me memories of my childhood that have molded me into what I am today. My belief system, which I inherited from my parents, dictates my actions in both my family life and work life, even now at the age of 55.

My father, my role model, spent his childhood in Mexico and moved to the U.S. at age 12; he spoke only Spanish, but learned to read and speak English quickly as a teenager. He supported our family as a hard working copper miner for over thirty years. He instilled in all of his children strong conservative values. The first of these values is a strong work ethic, modeled by my father throughout his life. My father was considered one of the highest paid miners in Bisbee. He made more in bonus (explain bonus) than his regular salary. Fellow workers and friends would often talk to me about my father's work ethic; one of the things he left us was the philosophy to work hard. "Work harder than anyone else you work with," he would say, "because it will pay off by ensuring more opportunities for advancement and success."

The second value he expressed to us was taking responsibility for our actions; He would state that the choices we make determine the behaviors we would display- positive or negative choices means positive or negative behaviors.

The third and most important value was the necessity of an education. In the early fifties, my parents decided to purchase a set of encyclopedias in order to ensure our

success in school. It was a financial sacrifice they were willing to endure for the sake of our education. My father would always remind us that reading the set of encyclopedias would guarantee good grades, and told us we should read every volume cover to cover. My oldest brother, Manuel, took him up on it and read every volume. Today, my brother is an avid reader. He recently retired from 35 successful years in teaching both children and adults.

A fourth tenet of my father's was to never rely on other people or government to take care of you financially. Do not assume the attitude of self identified victims, who must be cared for because they cannot, or will not, take care of themselves. Such people are not self sufficient. One of my father's best attributes was his self-sufficiency, and he made US that way also.

“Doing for people what they can and ought to do for themselves is a dangerous experiment,” the great labor leader Samuel Gompers said. “In the last analysis, the welfare of the workers depends on their own initiative.” Let me say that again. “Doing for people what they can and ought to do for themselves is a dangerous experiment; the welfare of the workers depends on their own initiative.” That is a lesson to be learned and should be taught to future generations. My father, Carlos Miramon Garcia, would agree with this quotation, though he might have said it differently: Relying on someone else for your needs, kills an individual's spirit to become self reliant and self sufficient.

As an educator, I embraced those same conservative beliefs more strongly than ever as I entered my career as a classroom teacher and then as a high school principal. My own educational experience gave me the strength and courage to insist on high standards and high expectations for all students regardless of language or nationality. I believed, and still believe, that all kids could learn, and that we as educators could make a difference in students' futures by doing several things. Make sure that all students, regardless of ethnicity or economic status are required to meet the same classroom expectations in order to be promoted to the next grade or to graduate high school. Watering down their learning was not going to help these students advance educationally or become productive citizens.

One of the challenges I had to fight against was the belief by many Latino advocates and educators that we should never test English Language Learners better known as ELLs, and, therefore, not hold them accountable for their learning. Many of these students were exempt from testing on national exams. In my heart, I knew this was wrong. These students themselves wondered why they were not being tested like the other students. Schools would send the ELL students who were exempt from the test to the cafeteria to view Rocky I, II, or III, or whatever movie they could get. I knew I was right in my belief that schools were not doing these students any favor by not testing them. We had no idea what these students knew compared to other students; we had no idea whether these students could compete with other high school's students. But what was more damaging was the students' decreasing perception of their own self worth. These students were not being valued enough to test, and I thought that was absolutely unacceptable. We were enabling these students - feeling sorry for them and making excuses, which is what I had been taught by my father not to do. There was a time when several ELL students came to talk to me about why they were called ELL students and why they did not have the same courses and same textbooks as the other students, and why they were not placed in regular classes with everyone else. They did not like the fact that educators did not believe they could learn the content. They expressed to me that once they could speak, read and write English, which they thought were not hard skills to learn, then they should be given an opportunity to take the regular course of study. I totally agreed with them, and that's what has inspired me to preserve the rights of all students to have access to high standards. That visit from those students and their plea to be treated like the other students in the school still rings as another value of my father's: A strong work ethic to succeed.

That's why in 1999, I became politically involved with a hot educational issue- English for the Children. I was joined by a large number of Latino individuals who felt as strongly as I did about the fact that non native speakers of English should learn to speak, read and write English as soon as possible, that these students needed to be tested with the same standards as other students, and that they too had the right to attend college.

We believed all students needed to learn English as quickly as possible in order for them to be successful in education and in life. These students were being kept in

programs far too long teaching them in their native language and not immersing them into English quickly. These students were referred to as lifers and not expected to measure up to the same standards as native speakers of English.

As I speak to you today, there is a lawsuit which says some students from low-income or non-English speaking backgrounds should not have to pass AIMS in order to receive a diploma. This is an insult to non native speakers of English. It states to them, loud and clear, the educational establishment does not believe they are as smart or capable as other students. When one group of students receives a diploma for doing well in school and another group is given the same diploma for just showing up to class, then the diploma is not worth very much at all. If students can't master reading, writing and math, those students will have to settle for lower paying jobs, lower status dead-end careers. I will continue to insist on equal access to educational challenges and opportunities that are given to everyone. I will advocate for high standards and high expectations for all students.

And there you have it. I, a Republican Latina, have fought for the academic and self esteem rights of all Latinos through my entire academic career. I, a Republican Latina, definitely do not hate Latinos. To do so would make me hate myself, my family and many of my friends. That is absurd.

Again, I am not here to convert you. I happen to be Republican. I thought it through myself. And I came up to my own conclusion. I didn't do it based on what someone told me to think. In the end, what you believe is never more important than knowing why you believe, regardless of what you become, Republican, Democrat, or Independent. Research what each party represents, compare it to your own set of beliefs, and then make up your mind. By doing that, you can stick to the issues and have a healthy debate on any issue, without having to resort to personal attacks or biased, general statements.

Please, I urge each and every one of you, to honestly seek truth on any issue before you believe it yourself or to take the time to advocate for it. And yes, if you wish,

you can either listen to what I've said or not. But please, do so independently, thinking for yourself as a proud thinking individual, not based on what someone tells you to think.

Thank you and Godspeed.